



LESTRIS CATARRACTES.

Skua Gull.

Larus Catarractes, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 818.—Linn. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 226.—Gmel. Edit., vol. i. p. 603.

Lestris Catarractes, Temm. Man. d'Orn., p. 511.—Id. 2nd Edit., p. 792.

Larus fuscus, Briss. Orn., vol. vi. p. 165.

Catharacta Skua, Brunn., No. 125. Retz. Faun. Suecica, No. 123.

Le Goeland brun, Buff. Hist. Nat. des Ois., tom. viii. p. 408.

Port Egmont Hen, Hawks. Voy., vol. ii. p. 283.—Cook's Voy., vol. i. pp. 44, 272.—Forst. Voy., vol. i. pp. 109, 118, &c.

Skua Gull, of British authors.

EVERY voyager to and from Australia, whether by the Cape of Good Hope or Cape Horn, will observe that in all the higher latitudes the ship will be frequently visited by solitary examples of this Gull, which may be distinguished from the Albatroses and Petrels by its more flapping and heavier mode of flight, and by the white mark on the wing, which shows conspicuously when seen from beneath; it appears, however, to be attracted to the ship more from curiosity than from aught else, for after passing round it two or three times, it wings its way again over the expansive ocean until lost to sight; it is as often seen in the open ocean a thousand miles from land, as it is near the coast, and as all the other Gulls frequent seas studded with islands on which they can alight at pleasure, I was for a long time surprised how a bird of this family could exist so far from any apparent means of repose, until the difficulty was at last solved by my seeing the bird settle on the masses of sea-weeds which here and there float about in all seas, and on which it rested with as much ease as if standing on a rock. Its predatory habits enable it to get food in abundance by chasing the Albatroses and Petrels and compelling them to disgorge their food, and hence its common name of Great Parasitic Gull or Skua. So little difference is observable between the examples of the Southern Ocean and those found in our own seas, that I have been compelled to consider them to belong to the same species. It was nowhere more abundant than off the coast of Van Diemen's Land, and may be frequently seen in Storm Bay at the mouth of the Derwent; it may also be seen off New Zealand and all similar latitudes round the globe; and that it also visits higher latitudes is evidenced by a note with which I have been favoured by R. McCormick, Esq., Surgeon R.N., wherein he states that it is found as far south as Kerguelen's Land and Campbell Island.

I may mention that all the specimens from the southern hemisphere are rather darker in colour and somewhat larger in size than those from the northern. I observed no difference in the colouring of the sexes, which may be thus described:—

All the upper surface blackish brown, the feathers of the back with whitish shafts and tips; all the under surface chocolate-brown; base and shafts of the primaries white; bill and feet black.

The figure is about three-fourths of the natural size.